DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 947 SO 009 212

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TITLE Social Studies: Their Nature and Potential. Background Paper.
PUB DATE 10 May 76
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the International Meeting of Experts on the Role of Social Studies in Education for Peace and Respect for Human Rights (Kellogg Center, East Lansing, Michigan, May 23-29, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis; Definitions; Elementary Secondary Education; *Global Approach; Inquiry Training; Intellectual Disciplines; International Education; *Knowledge Level; Social Behavior; *Social Sciences; *Social Studies; Social Systems; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The nature of the social studies and their international dimensions are examined. Discussion focuses on the definition of the social studies and the role of knowledge and ways of knowing in the social studies. In contrast to the social sciences, the social studies are designed primarily for instructional purposes. They include the substantive portions of human behavior and procedural modes that have been selected and adapted for use in schools and other instructional situations. Also, the process by which a social studies class deals with subject matter is part of the social studies. The internationalization of social studies is due to a common knowledge base accepted globally by all social scientists. Because the social studies are in the center of a constant quest for verifiable knowledge as their content, it is noted that verification requires meeting certain condition of evidence and truth. This process of verification has been brought into the classroom through the use of an inductive method of inquiry. These epistemological considerations are relevant beyond the classroom, though, because they illustrate the development of a common cultural element in the emerging global society. The paper concludes that students should become aware of the common intellectual and affective bonds that unite them to their academic and social brothers throughout the world. (Author/ND)

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Have you time to see Margaret when you are in Boulder
Thanks-
Judy Torney

East Lansing, Michigan, USA
10 May, 1976
Original: English

ED125947

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF EXPERTS ON THE ROLE OF
SOCIAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

23 - 29 May 1976

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Background Paper

The Social Studies: Their Nature and Potential

by

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SUMMARY

Two basic topics are addressed in this paper: The first, largely descriptive, is concerned with a definition of the social studies. The second, largely analytical and prescriptive, is concerned with the role of knowledge and ways of knowing in the social studies.

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THE SOCIAL STUDIES: THEIR NATURE AND POTENTIAL

This is a conference on the social studies. That fact alone is not remarkable. After all, we have all at some time or other attended various conferences on teaching, on research, on instructional materials, on sundry professional matters. This is also an international conference. That too is not necessarily remarkable. Given the professional status and occupational position of the conference delegates here it is very likely that most of us have had the opportunity to participate in other such conferences attended by an international clientele.

But it is a literally remarkable event to hold this first international conference on one aspect of social studies teaching, i.e., its role in education for peace and respect for human rights. Given the unique nature of this conference it appears to be especially appropriate to address ourselves initially to two basic and interrelated concerns: (1) the nature of the social studies and (2) the international dimensions of the social studies and its related discipline, the social sciences.

In much the same way as the first speaker for the affirmative in a formal debate, I view my first task and responsibility as that of defining our terms. I realize, of course, the problem inherent in attempting to formulate a definition that is acceptable to fifteen professionally competent and qualified individuals who live in societies that may have differing values, orientations, and views of what constitutes social reality. My approach, therefore, is not to define dogmatically and for all time the nature of the social studies. Rather it is to place before you a range of possible views and perspectives on this entity we shall be bandying about during the ensuing week of deliberations. And, not surprising, I shall conclude with some observations of my

own on the nature of the beast. The range of definitions of the social studies can be placed on a continuum with this definition at one end: "The social sciences are foundations of the social studies in three distinctive ways. First, the social sciences are primary sources of the content of the social studies: the concepts, generalizations, and methods of inquiry. Second, the social foundations of curriculum planning in the social studies draw data from the social sciences related to societal values, problems, changing conditions, and our democratic heritage. Third, the psychological foundations of curriculum planning in the social studies draw data from the social sciences related to social processes, learning, child development, and other psychological-methodological aspects of instruction." (1)

At the other end of the continuum is a statement like this: "Social studies (is) that part of the school's general education program which is concerned with the preparation of citizens for participation in a democratic society. Social studies is not, then, simply an offshoot of the social sciences, with content to be dictated by the interests and desires of academicians in the social studies and history."(2)

By further examining the literature one can find additional definitions at or near these ends of the continuum and at several points in between. Let me at this point make some observations and attempt some distinctions. (3) We have observed from various definitions that the field of the social studies incorporates a blend of characteristics. It is concerned with the needs of the individual and with the problems of society. It inquires into the attitudes that people have toward social phenomena and examines the intellectual tools that humankind has fashioned to assess competing claims to knowledge. Even though the social studies have evolved into an entity of their own we have also observed that they bear a close relationship to the social sciences. Some use the term

synonymously with the social sciences. Others take special pains to disassociate it from the social sciences. Perhaps it may be helpful to describe some common characteristic relationships between the social studies and the social sciences.

The term social sciences has come to be viewed as applicable to scholarly materials about the interrelationship of human beings with one another, with groups, and with their environment. An economist's monograph on the gross national product of a given nation, a sociologist's study of the power structure of a village tribe, a political scientist's proposed international agreement on the peaceful use of outer space are examples of materials that belong among the social sciences. They are the results of orderly experimentation. They are addressed to a community of scholars, and they must meet the standards of scholarship. Although the materials of the social sciences may or may not be used for instructional purposes at the college or even high-school level, their primary purpose is to add to our store of verified facts, testable knowledge claims, and theoretical propositions.

It is not surprising that in an area as dynamic and comparatively young as the social sciences the boundary lines of the field are fluid and changing with each generation. No better indication of this malleability is found than in the underlying framework of two encyclopedias on the social sciences: the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, published in the early 1930s, and the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, published a generation later in 1968. The first defined the social sciences as consisting of politics, economics, law, anthropology, sociology, penology, and social work. The second took a more expanded view and included articles devoted to the concepts, theories, and methods of the following disciplines:

1. Anthropology--including cultural, economic, physical, political, social, and applied anthropology, as well as archeology, ethnography, ethnology, and linguistics.
2. Economics--including econometrics, economic history, the history of economic thought, economic development, agricultural economics, industrial organization, international economics, labor economics, money and banking, public finance, and certain aspects of business management.
3. Geography--including cultural, economic, political, and social geography, but not physical geography.
4. History--including the traditional subject-matter fields of history and the scope and methods of historiography.
5. Law--including jurisprudence, the major legal systems, legal theory, and the relation of law to the other social sciences.
6. Political science--including public administration, public law, international relations, comparative politics, political theory, and the study of policy making and political behavior.
7. Psychiatry--including theories and descriptions of the principal mental disorders and methods of diagnosis and treatment.
8. Psychology--including clinical, counseling, educational, experimental, personality, physiological, social, and applied psychology.
9. Sociology--including economic, organizational, political, rural, and urban sociology; the sociologies of knowledge, law, religion, and medicine; human ecology; the history of social thought; sociometry and other small-group reserach; survey research; and such special fields as criminology and demography.

10. Statistics--including theoretical statistics, the design of experiments, non-sampling errors, sample surveys, government statistics, and the use of statistical methods in social science research.

The editors of the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences observed that there is no final answer to the question of what are the social sciences. The definition very likely will continue to change from generation to generation. Even within our present generation there are differences of opinion as to whether history is properly included in the social sciences or in the humanities, whether geography is a social or an earth science, and whether psychology is a social or a natural science.

Now for the attempt at synthesis and a definition. In contrast with the social sciences, the social studies are designed primarily for instructional purposes. They include those substantive portions of human behavior as well as those procedural modes of inquiry that have been selected and adapted for use in the schools or other instructional situations. The term social studies indicates materials whose content and aim are predominantly social. The social studies utilize the substantive and procedural aspects of the social sciences for pedagogical purposes. A primary grade unit of study on local geography, a middle grade inquiry into the causes of the Second World War, or a secondary school project that relates practical work experience with economic principles have little or nothing to contribute to the sum total of new human knowledge. They are, however, examples of the utilization of the social sciences for instructional purposes. They are examples of social studies materials.

Although the social sciences and the social studies are alike in that both deal with human relationships, they differ as to standards and purposes. The fundamental tests of the social sciences are scholarship and eventual social

utility, whereas the fundamental test of the social studies is instructional utility. The justification for the social studies emerges out of the needs of the individual and the imperatives of society. Some kind of socialization process--or social education--would be needed even if no entity called the social sciences existed. But the fact that it does exist provides the social studies teacher and student with a rich and indispensable source of concepts, insights, procedures, and data.

The process by which a social studies class deals with subject matter is just as indispensable a part of the social studies as the content of the material itself. Included in these processes are such intangibles as the atmosphere of the classroom--from authoritarian to democratic; the rules by which knowledge claims are assessed--from an a priori to a scientific basis; and the framework within which questions of value are handled--from arbitrarily imposed assumptions to tentative and reflectively examined assumptions. Here again, the parallel between the social studies and the social sciences is relevant. For the social scientist is also concerned with the conditions under which he conducts his investigations--his biases, methodology, and assumptions.

Let us now turn to the second distinctive ingredient of this conference--its international dimension. Here my observations will be not only descriptive but also highly selective. I intend to focus on one phenomenon which is pertinent to any discussion of the social studies but especially relevant for a gathering of this sort. For want of a better term I shall refer to this phenomenon as the internationalization of a discipline. Let me introduce this idea by excerpting portions of the Introduction to The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences:

> . . . It is not just that the vocabulary of the social sciences has infiltrated everyday speech, although it is common for persons with no formal training in the social sciences to use such terms as "IQ," "subculture," "power structure," "GNP," and "the unconscious" in their daily conversation. More important, many people today perceive the world differently because they have been exposed to the perspective of the social sciences: they raise their children differently; they have different attitudes toward government borrowing and spending; they make different judgments of their friends, neighbors and family members; they view both local and national politics differently; they place a different and more sympathetic interpretation upon the guilt of criminals, drug addicts, and deviants of all kinds; and they make different judgments of their own successes and failures. Whether people are aware of it or not . . . the social sciences have influenced, if not determined, the assumptions about reality upon which their daily lives are based.

When the editors of the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences added the word international to the previous title, one can assume that they did this not to postulate a platitude about the world getting smaller nor to confirm a cliche about the interdependence of man. The significance of the additional word goes far beyond this. For one thing, it denotes the audience to whom the articles in the encyclopedia are addressed. It also denotes the wide academic and national backgrounds of the contributors. Even though it was published by an American publishing company, 322 of its more than 100 contributors were affiliated with educational or other institutions outside the United States of America. But the most significant implication of this convergence of diverse contributors and readers is the remarkable uniformity of their criteria for establishing knowledge claims. For the most part, they operate from a common epistemological base. More than any one factor, it is this common basis of verifying knowledge that makes the social sciences truly international.

The world intellectual community has never seriously questioned the international nature of a discipline like mathematics. The same can be said of the

physical sciences and, to a lesser extent, of the biological sciences. The Lysenko controversy, involving the alleged hereditary transmission of acquired characteristics, is an example of a rare epistemological clash among scientists in a given discipline. The general rule among practitioners in all the sciences--including the social sciences--is an adherence to a kind of full-faith-and-credit clause binding them all to observe certain scholarly amenities that permit any of the members of the fraternity to check the reported scientific findings of any other member. In the International Encyclopedia, for example, Odile Benoit-Guilbot of France reports on some studies on worker participation in factory management conducted in Poland. He does not fear that the informed reader will be unable to understand the process by which these studies were carried out. He knows that his academic colleagues can, within reasonable limits, replicate these studies in many other places in the world. The findings are universally relevant to the extent that they are empirically valid. And the procedure for validating them is common. It is international.

What are the implications for the social studies teacher of the internationalization of the social sciences? We could speak of the need for developing more of a worldwide outlook in social studies classrooms--and this would have considerable validity. But even more important is the need for the contemporary student to know the mode of inquiry of the social scientist, to know how he generates his knowledge claims. The student needs to know this at both the cognitive and affective levels. He needs to know the rudimentary aspects of the scientific method as it applies to social relations. And he needs to commit himself to the value of learning through a reasoned, logical, and reflective process rather than through the intellectual short circuit of "knowing" on the basis of unsupported generalizations or gut-level biases.

The existence of a common epistemological base among the scientists of the world provides us with perhaps the most important characteristic of a world society. To speak in terms of a world society is not to engage in propagandistic internationalism or maudlin fraternalism. It is merely to affirm what exists. Social studies teachers can neither ignore nor avoid the fact. The emergence of this viable world society is one of the most compelling events of the twentieth century.

Regardless of national origins most of us, young and old, can feel a responsive chord at these word written by Descartes in 1640 in his Meditations on the First Philosophy:

> It is now some years since I detected how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis. . . .

In his quest for certainty, Descartes tells us, he inquired into everything he presumably knew to see what, if anything, he could accept as verifiable knowledge. The quest goes on with modern humans in contemporary society. It is not surprising that the social studies should now be in the thick of this continuing quest. What is surprising is the relative neglect of epistemological considerations in the past among educators as a whole and social studies educators in particular.

This is not the place for a detailed treatise on the question of what is knowledge. It is possible, for example, for one to start from any of several approaches--the rational, the empirical, the pragmatic, the intuitive. But any claim to knowledge, no matter how initiated, must also meet agreed upon conditions. Perhaps the most important of these conditions is that there be adequate evidence to support the knowledge claim. Ultimately, any claim to

knowledge must also meet the condition of truthfulness.

The truth condition of knowledge is the most difficult condition to meet. One reason for this difficulty is the age-old and still unresolved question, "What is truth?" The range of possible philosophical positions with regard to the question extends from the notion of a fixed and absolute conception of truth, to a relativistic one, to one that says the question is unanswerable. The extent of the distances between these various positions is exemplified by the following quotations, the first from the pen of a distinguished educational philosopher and the second by a group of outstanding scholars:

> Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same . . . . I suggest that the heart of any course of study designed for the whole people will be, if education is rightly understood, the same at any time, in any place, under any political, social, or economic conditions.[4]

> Being a form of social action, education always has a geographical and cultural location; it is therefore specific, local, and dynamic, not general, universal, and unchanging; it is a function of a particular society at a particular time and place in history; it is rooted in some actual culture and expresses the philosophy and recognized needs of that culture.[5]

It is not within the scope of this discussion to go into all the implications for the social studies teacher of these varying conceptions of the truth condition of knowledge. But just to drive home the fact that such abstract considerations do indeed have practical implications for the social studies, we refer to the increasing concern in recent years by social studies curriculum builders and classroom teachers with the use of the inductive method of inquiry as the major--some would say, the only--legitimate approach to social studies instruction. Much of the literature reads as if this mode of inquiry were only a recent "discovery" and heralds a new "revolution" in the social studies.

Actually, the epistemological considerations underlying this mode of inquiry were dealt with in considerable detail at least as early as the seventeenth century by the philosopher David Hume. He concluded categorically that it is impossible to arrive at any uncontestable generalizations on the basis of the inductive method of inquiry alone. His argument is best illustrated by the classic example that a person cannot validly generalize that "All swans are white," even though he may never have seen anything but white swans during his entire lifetime. Since it would be a practical impossibility for a person to observe all swans in the world, and since the existence of only one exception would invalidate the generalization, no such knowledge claim can be made. The same argument would apply to all other generalizations based on induction. How true, then, is the statement that the inductive mode of inquiry should be the only (or best or most preferred) approach to teaching the social studies? This example is cited not to argue that the inductive mode of inquiry is useless or has no place in social studies instruction but rather to tender a warning about overextending an inherently restrictive warrant of knowledge. Inquiry has a legitimate heuristic value to the social studies student. It should not be reduced to ineffectiveness by exceeding its philosophical load limit.

The significance for the social studies teacher of these epistemological considerations goes beyond their relevance for the classroom--as important as that is. They illustrate the development of a common cultural element in our emerging world society. The rules of the game, as it were, are becoming internationalized. This is certainly true among the educational decision makers in the nations of the world. It is recognized, of course, that there may be large numbers of people who continue to use a rather narrow conception of authority, for example, as a warrant for knowledge claims. These authorities

may reside in sacred books of scriptures, tribal chiefs, authoritarian leaders, or ministries of education. But as the dissemination of educational ideas and innovations catches up with the dissemination of technological know-how, the hoped-for consequence will be a worldwide community of scholars and informed citizens.

The charge is clear to those of us in the social studies who will be inducting the young into a twenty-first century of peace and respect for human rights: Make students aware of the common intellectual and affective bonds that unite them to their academic and social brothers throughout the world.

Footnotes

1. Michaelis, John U. and Johnston, A. Montgomery, editors. The Social Sciences: Foundations of the Social Studies. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965. p. 15.

2. Shaver, James P. "Social Studies: The Need for Redefinition", Social Education. November, 1967. p. 589.

3. Portions of the remaining part of this paper are adapted from Wesley, Edgar B. and Wronski, Stanley P. Teaching Secondary School Social Studies in a World Society, sixth edition. Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1973. Chapter 1.

4. Hutchins, Robert M. The Higher Learning in America. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936. p. 66.

5. American Historical Association, Commission on the Social Studies. Conclusions and Recommendations. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934. pp. 31-32.